

CHAPTER h:22-10

SIGNING AUTHORITY FOR REPLIES TO  
CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY

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22-10-00 PURPOSE

This chapter establishes broad policy concerning signing authority for replies to correspondence received from outside HEW and addressed to the Secretary.

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22-10-10 POLICY

The Secretary has directed that the authority for signing replies to non-policy correspondence addressed to him, primarily of an informational nature affecting the operations of the Department, should be decentralized to operating agencies and staff offices. Heads of operating agencies and staff offices may likewise decentralize the signing authority for such letters.

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22-10-20 RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Correspondence Control Unit. The Correspondence Control Unit has the initial responsibilities for: determining the operating agency or staff office to prepare the reply to a letter; and determining whether the reply should be prepared for the Secretary's signature or for the signature of another official. This Unit will consult with the Congressional Liaison Officer of the Office of the Secretary or other staff officers as appropriate when supplementary guidance is needed in making referrals for the preparation of replies. Congressional correspondence, whether of a routine nature designated for direct reply by operating agencies or referred for the preparation of a reply for signature by the Secretary, will be routed through the Congressional Liaison Officer enroute to the operating agencies.
- B. Preparing Office. The official to whom a letter is referred for action (the preparing office) has responsibility for assuring that the incoming letter has been referred to the appropriate operating agency or staff office and that the determination of signing level is correct. As provided by present procedures, one carbon copy of all letters to members of Congress shall be sent to the Congressional Liaison Officer.

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22-10-30 TIME LIMIT FOR PREPARATION OF REPLIES

- A. The standard time limit for dispatch of a reply to all correspondence addressed to the Secretary is five working days from the date of receipt of the letter in the Secretary's office, unless a briefer period is indicated.
- B. If a complete reply cannot be made within five working days, the preparing office shall write within two working days an acknowledgment for the signature of the official who will sign the complete reply. The acknowledgment shall state the date when a complete reply may be expected.

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22-10-40 PREPARATION OF CORRESPONDENCE REFERRED FOR DIRECT REPLY

- A. Replies to all correspondence addressed to the Secretary and referred for direct reply shall open with the statement that the Secretary has asked the signing official to reply to the correspondent's letter. The reply shall also indicate that the correspondent may write again to the Secretary if he has further questions.
- B. In special cases where the tone or nature of the letter so indicates, the preparing office shall write an acknowledgment for the Secretary's signature. The acknowledgment shall contain a statement that the Secretary has asked a specific official of the Department to reply to the correspondence. The preparing office shall then prepare the direct reply to the correspondent.